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Hilles, Charles Dewey

Statement re: New York
juvenile asylum...

[S.I.]

[1918]

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STATEMENT RE: NEW YORK JUVENILE ASYLUM

The New York Juvenile Asylum is a correctional institution for the detention, care, and education of boys under 18 years of age who are committed by the courts of New York City. The capacity of the institution is 600. The Asylum was founded in 1854 with the sanction and active co-operation of the Mayor and other important city officials, since which time the courts have been wholly dependent upon it and institutions of like character for the care of juvenile delinquents. It is an essential—indeed, an indispensable—arm of the correctional system of New York City.

The founders and city fathers of three-quarters of a century ago wisely concluded to induce charitably disposed citizens to provide the land, buildings, and supervision without expense to the city, upon condition that the city would supply the funds for current expenses.

The city determines and establishes the standards of living and schooling, making the schools an integral part of the public school system, and compels a compliance with its requirements; it also appropriates in advance the funds to meet the maintenance charges, adopting in the budget a per capita rate of reimbursement.

At intervals in very recent years the per capita rate has been advanced in consequence of the marked increase in the cost of commodities, but these increases in the rate were admittedly insufficient, the plea being that there was not enough money to go around. The result is that during each year since the beginning of the world war there has been a deficit in the running expenses, while at the same time the new demands upon the former individual donors have been so numerous, so heavy, and so irresistibly ap-

pealing as to preclude further financial support for our work from the old sympathetic circle of contributors.

Hence, the Juvenile Asylum finds itself running behind seriously. Within the past twelve months it has had to give an additional mortgage for \$25,000 to pay off current obligations. There is a limit to its borrowing capacity, and that limit has now been reached.

We must have an increase of ten per cent. in the per capita allowance if the institution is to continue to perform its work. We are estopped from lowering the standard of living in the institution by the rigid requirements of the City Commissioner of Charities and of the State Board of Charities, as well as by our own resolution to deal justly and humanely with a potential class which is a temporary burden to society as the result of neglect and of insufficient food, clothing and training.

As the result of an exhaustive inquiry which was conducted last year (the facts having been presented to the Mayor and Board of Estimate and Apportionment at the time) it was demonstrated that the per capita allowance contributed by New York City to institutions for the care and training of juvenile delinquents and dependents is very much less than the cost to the city for like service in institutions exclusively under the city's management; that the rate fixed by the city is very much less than the actual cost to the institutions; that it is very much less than the rate paid for service in like institutions up-state; and that not only the rate paid, but the actual expense per child incurred, is very much less in these New York City institutions than the average cost in the state-managed and municipally-managed institutions throughout the United States.

This is not the time to discuss at length the function of the institution for juvenile delinquents in the scheme of city government, but it is important to point out that it is the custodian of difficult boys who have profited little from ordinary school instruction and influences.

It is true that the mental development of this class is

June 4, 1920

exceedingly uneven. They show much power of rational judgment, but with singular retardation in specific applications. At the time of their commitment, the majority are intellectually very immature, generally representing the primary level. Their methods in manual expression are distinctly primitive, but they quickly develop manual dexterity. They are unable to undertake independent employment and entirely unfit for education in the public schools. Their physical condition shows the underlying causes of much of their difficulty. Usually they are in the transition period from childhood to adolescence, with more than the usual mental and physical disturbance characteristic of that epoch. They demand and deserve special treatment, to which treatment they respond satisfactorily. They are not atypical children. Unlike the wards of institutions for the mentally and physically unfit, these boys are hopeful and, if the institution is manned and equipped to make the best of its opportunity, the percentage of "salvage" is high.

The work is of even greater importance to society in these trying times than in peace times, for the conservation and proper training of boys approaching the draft age is a duty we owe to the nation as well as to the individual. To say that it is an imperative duty of first importance to conserve the young manhood of New York is to state the obvious, and this being true, the obligation of the city officials to pay the irreducible maintenance charges of these institutions is inescapable.

Unless the New York Juvenile Asylum should now receive an increase of at least fifty cents per child per week, it is difficult to see how its directors can avoid asking the City government to relieve the school from a further discharge of the obligation conditionally assumed by the founders seventy-five years ago.

Very truly yours,

Charles D. Hilles,
Treasurer.

September 3, 1918.

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